

"RAVEN" MANTEL IS IN BROOKLYN

Owner Offers to Donate Frame
of Fireplace Before
Which Poe Wrote
Masterpiece.

New York Times Saturday Review of Books:



HAVE the mantel and fireplace frame before which Edgar A. Poe wrote "The Raven," which I will donate to any public institution that will competently preserve it.

Here are the proofs: Between the time of Poe's arrival from Philadelphia, in March, 1844, and his removal to the Fordham shanty, which is now the object of many pilgrims, in 1846, he boarded two Summers at the farmhouse owned and occupied by a Mr. Brennan, father of the late Commissioner Brennan and of Mrs. General O'Beirne of Manhattan. During that time "The Raven" was written and published. The writer of this has had frequent interviews and correspondence with the Brennan family, from whom he has obtained complete authentication of the genuineness of this valuable relic, as seen from the following:

Nineteen years ago West Eighty-fourth Street was cut through the hill from Manhattan Avenue to the Hudson River, demolishing the old Brennan farmhouse. The appearance of this I had been familiar with from the accurate engravings in Gill's biography of Poe. What was called the Raven

Room is minutely pictured, even to the carvings upon the mantel as it stands before us to-day. It was a lone house, high upon a bluff, and commanding a grand view of the slope and river. The present Eighty-fourth Street cut through the farm is about fifty feet deep, through stratified rock, so that the place of the cottage and the Raven Room would be up among the clothes lines of the third story, rear, of No. 108.

In 1888, seeing a newspaper notice that the house was about to be destroyed, I proceeded thither with a party of friends, purchased the mantel from the contractor, and received from him a bill of sale. Before that I had corresponded with Mr. Otto Ernst, who had purchased a large tract there, including the Brennan farm, and was familiar with, and especially interested in, its Poe associations. He assured me there had been no alterations in the house for fifty years, and procured for me the names of the living Brennan family who occupied the house at the time that Poe lived there. We found the house tottering and about to fall into the cut. Our party regarded the room with profound sentiment. The "chamber door" was the first object of interest, but it was so meagre and plain, with no transom, and only seven inches from the top of the casing to the ceiling, that there could not have been any contemplation by Poe of the "lordly raven" that "perched upon the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door." So we turned to the ever holy foyer, and we knew for a fact that right there the poet had seen how "each flickering, dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor." I had to decide quickly between selecting the door or the fireplace, as only one could be carried, there being no means

of conveyance at hand. Seizing a crow-bar from a workman, I pried off the mantel and casing, exposing the original masonry, to which they were fastened by five-inch spikes, shouldered the relic, and carried it several blocks until an express office was found. Within ten minutes the door was in splinters. The ceiling was only seven and a half feet from the floor, so that I reached over the top bar of the door casing and found there three nail holes, showing something had been fastened there.

I received permission from Mrs. General O'Beirne to visit her at her apartments in the Gladstone Hotel, Central Park, to complete my information. This lady informed me, with much emotion, about her old homestead and about her memory, as a child of six years, of Poe and his wife, Virginia. She said there was a stylish out-of-town boarding house near where the city people came for Summer board. We may here recall that the site is now West Eighty-fourth Street, near Manhattan, between the Boulevard and Manhattan Avenue, instead of being "out of town." This child was a favorite of the poet, often receiving from him candy and fruit "brought from the city," and standing by his knee to turn his sheets of paper, ink side down, to her curiosity and amusement, as the writer finished each page. Poe had importuned entertainment at that farmhouse because he could not dress his wife like the ladies of the more public house across the way. The "couple" were there two Summers, forming affectionate intimacy with the family, the poet often reading to them his compositions.

My interview with Mrs. O'Beirne I took down in shorthand at the time, and still have the notes. To the direct

question, how she knew Poe wrote "The Raven" in that room, she answered that she remembered some of the sentiments of the poem as he had read to the family; that there was a large rock upon which he often sat to write, surrounded by trees and in view of the river; that he would often come in from there and read his productions. She remembers his chivalric affection for his wife, often carrying her in his arms to the meals; also she described his lying in the loft, hearing the rain upon the shingles, next to a window in view of the slope, the river, and the Jersey coast beyond, and there reading books. The inquiry was made whether there was any article of adornment above the chamber door. The reply was that there had been a little plaster cast upon a circular shelf, and that some Philadelphia people came and took it away many years ago when she lived there. Mrs. O'Beirne said there had never been any alteration in the trim of the room, and that the mantel was the same that the poet was familiar with.

Inasmuch as I am about to leave my homestead, where it has been placed around my own library hearth, I have taken this final method, Mr. Editor, to transmit for preservation this valuable and genuine relic. Documentary evidence will go with the gift.

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